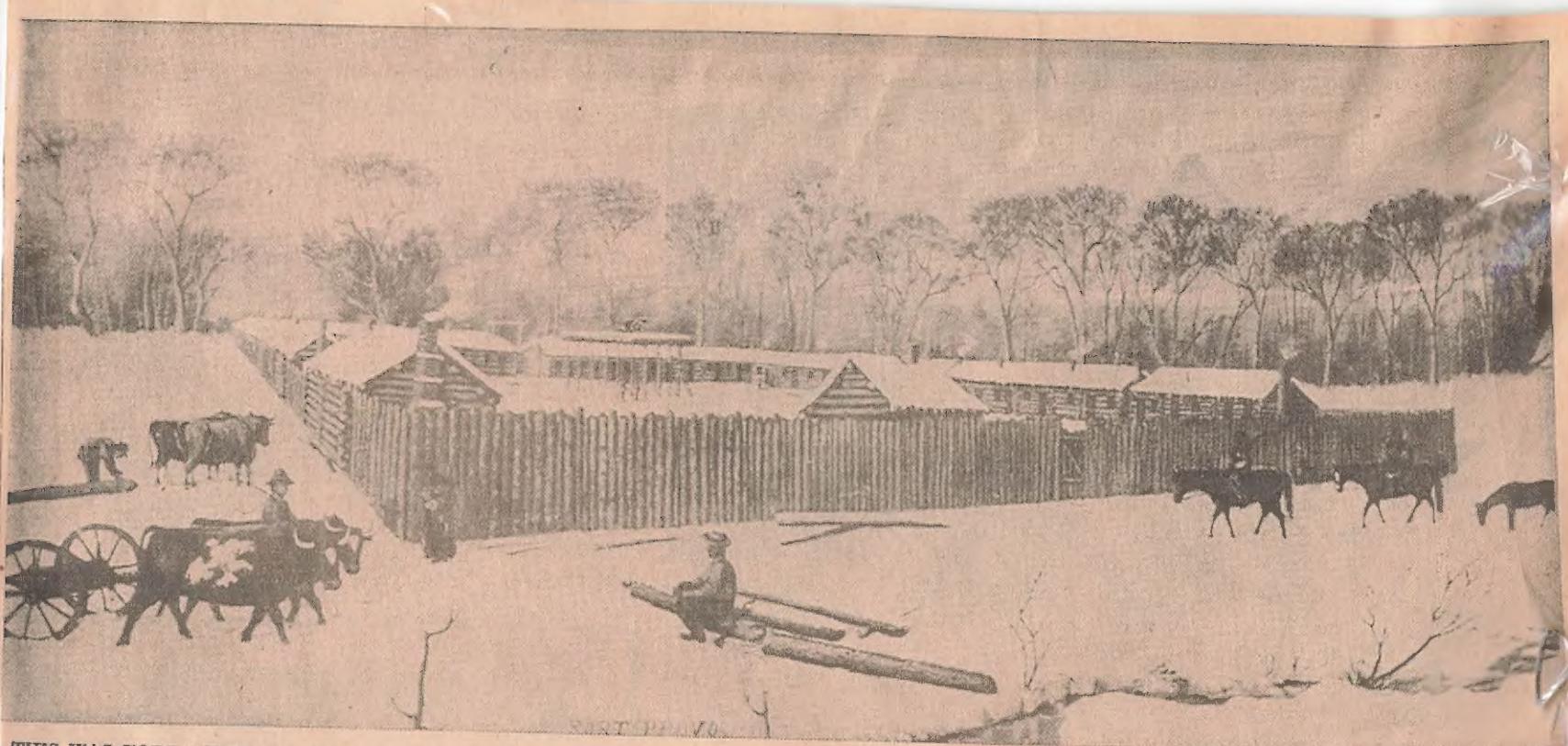


MAKES BUT
AG-ZA-SITCH
MSU



THIS WAS FORT UTAH (also known as Fort Provo) as interpreted in painting by Samuel Jepperson, early-day Provo artist. Note bastion for cannon erected in center. Small stream in foreground was from spring about 25 rods

northeast of fort from which the settlers obtained culinary water. Original fort was located 20 rods east of present Geneva Road, about 30 rods south of Provo River. (Photoprint by Joseph M. Boel)

Beginning of Colonization In Provo

Fort Utah: First Pioneer Settlement in Valley

1936 24 Oct 1967

(First of two articles)

By N. La Verl Christensen
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Lake Lions Club, in cooperation
with Provo City, will build
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- What was Fort Utah?
- Where was it located?
- Why was it built?

Fort Utah, you might say, was
Provo's first housing project—
a sizable number of log cabins
inside a stockade built for pro-
tection against the Indians.

Indeed it was the very begin-
ning of Provo, dating back to
1849. Begun April 3 of that year,
only days after arrival of the
first Mormon settlers here, the
fort provided the only practi-
cal means of colonizing Utah
Valley, home base of often-hos-
tile Ute Indians.

Two Locations

Fort Utah (also known as
Fort Prov) had two locations.
Originally it was built on the
south side of Provo River about
20 rods east of the present
Geneva Road and about 40 rods
north of Center Street—or just
a short distance northeast of
the historical marker erected
in 1937 by the Daughters of
Utah Pioneers (Provo Camp 7)
on the Walter Cox property to
commemorate its place in his-
tory.

In the spring of 1850—the set-
tlers decided to move to higher
ground because of flooding of
Provo River which turned the
fort area into a "sea of despair." They built their second
fort at the location of present-
day North (Sowiette) Park at
Fifth West and Fifth North.

Was the first fort actually
dismantled and moved or did
it remain in use at least until
after the new one was com-
pleted? This is a question for
which there seems no clearcut
answer. Both versions can be
found in Provo histories. With
Indians hostilities a constant
threat, logic suggests the pion-
eers would not have dismantled
one fort until the other were
at least partially completed.

Colonization Plan

Decision to send about 30 men
to colonize Utah Valley "for
the purpose of farming and
fishing and instructing the In-
dians" was made at a council
meeting March 10, 1849 at the
home of Heber C. Kimball in
Salt Lake City, with Brigham
Young presiding, according to
Church historical records.

On Tuesday, March 13, pros-
pective members of the colony

met at President Young's office
to receive instructions. John S.
Higbee was chosen to lead the
expedition as president of the
Provo Branch of the church.

The settlers and their famili-
ties numbered about 150 souls,
according to historians. They
entered the valley late in March
(there is controversy on the
actual date and this will be sub-
ject of a subsequent article

soon.)

Some distance from Provo
River the Mormons were met
by Ute Indians who blocked
their progress until they had
"sworn by the sun" that they
would not drive the redman
from their lands.

At the site where the original
Fort Utah was built, the pion-
eers found fertile soil to the
east, south and west; an abund-
ance of timber, especially from
"Boxelder Island" where the
river forked a short distance to
the west; and ample water.

There was additional favor-
able factor in the location. The
river, and a smaller stream
running southwest, seemed to
shut out the large "Mormon
crickets" which infested the val-
ley. The memory of the Salt
Lake Valley cricket episode
undoubtedly was fresh in the
pioneers' minds at the time.

Fort Utah was pretty well
completed six weeks after the
energetic settlers began con-
struction. This description of
the fort comes from PROVO,
PIONEER MORMON CITY,
published in 1942 by the Writers
Project of the Works Progress
Administration:

"Built around an ancient
mound, Fort Utah measured 20
by 40 rods, and was surrounded

by a 14-foot stockade with gates
at the east and west ends. Box-
elder trees, more durable and
more accessible than cotton-

wood trees, were used for lum-
ber. Within the stockade, log
cabins, generally roofed with
split lumber and dirt, were
grouped side by side. Each
boasted two cloth-covered win-
dows. (The pioneers had no
glass at that time.) Puncheons
were used for flooring. The va-
cant spaces between the houses
were filled with pickets embed-
ded closely together in the
ground. A cattle corral, at-
tached to the southeast corner
of the stockade, was used at
night, and a guardhouse was
erected within the corral. Small-
er private corrals were placed
behind some of the cabins. A
brass cannon, upon the mound,
commanded the surrounding
territory...."

The mound on which the can-
non was placed apparently
didn't have sufficient elevation
because about Sept. 1, 1849 the
settlers erected a bastion, ele-
vating a 30-foot-square platform
with log railings on which the
cannon was mounted.

Periodically they fired the
cannon to impress the Indians.
Despite this—and despite Brig-
ham Young's advise to "feed

instead of fight" the redmen
tensions mounted almost from
the start.

Unlike Salt Lake Valley, which
had not been a favorite Indian
campground, Utah Valley was
a treasured haunt and the an-
nual gathering place of the Ut-
ah tribes during the spawning sea-
son when fish moving up the
river from Utah Lake could be
caught with little effort for tra-
ditional feasting.

Relationships were already
somewhat strained when the
settlers arrived because four
or five renegade redmen had
been slain by whites in a skirmish
near present-day Pleasant
Grove March 4 of that year.
This was the first battle in Utah
between the Mormons and the
Indians. It took place when a
company of about 30 men from
Salt Lake Valley went after the
Indian band which had stolen a
sizeable herd of cattle. The site
of this skirmish was given the
name Battle Creek.

Indian-settler relations were
further kept off balance repeat-
edly by thefts and threats by the
former and an unwarranted
killing of an Indian by three
whites Aug. 1, 1849 in an alter-
cation over a shirt allegedly
stolen by him.

(To be concluded.)

Itemized 24 Oct 1967

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Indeed it was the very beginning of Provo, dating back to 1849. Begun April 3 of that year, only days after arrival of the first Mormon settlers here, the fort provided the only practicable means of colonizing Utah Valley, home base of often-hostile Ute Indians.

Two Locations

Fort Utah (also known as Fort Provo) had two locations. Originally it was built on the south side of Provo River about 20 rods east of the present Geneva Road and about 40 rods north of Center Street—or just a short distance northeast of the historical marker erected in 1937 by the Daughters of Utah Pioneers (Provo Camp 7) on the Walter Cox property to commemorate its place in history.

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Relationships were already somewhat strained when the settlers arrived because four or five renegade redmen had been slain by whites in a skirmish near present-day Pleasant Grove March 4 of that year. This was the first battle in Utah between the Mormons and the Indians. It took place when a company of about 30 men from Salt Lake Valley went after the Indian band which had stolen a sizeable herd of cattle. The site of this skirmish was given the name Battle Creek.

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